

The Unpardonable Sin

by Rich Ware

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Joseph Smith defined the unpardonable sin at a General Conference address on Sunday, April 7, 1844: All sins shall be forgiven [if you have been sealed up by the Holy Spirit of Promise--D&C 132:19, 26], except the sin against the Holy Ghost; for Jesus will save all except the sons of perdition. What must a man do to commit the unpardonable sin? He must receive the Holy Ghost, have the heavens opened unto him, and know God, and then sin against Him. After a man sinned against the Holy Ghost, there is no repentance for him.

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." (Heb. 6:4-6.) Those who sin against the light and knowledge of the Holy Ghost may be said to crucify more than the body of our Lord, they crucify the Spirit. He has got to say that the sun does not shine while he sees it; he has got to deny Jesus Christ when the heavens have been opened unto him, and to deny the plan of salvation with his eyes open to the truth of it; and from that time he begins to be an enemy. This is the case with many apostates of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When a man begins to be an enemy to this work, he hunts me, he seeks to kill me, and never ceases to thirst for my blood. He gets the spirit of the devil--the same spirit that they had who crucified the Lord of Life---the same spirit that sins against the Holy Ghost. You cannot save such persons; you cannot bring them to repentance; they make open war, like the devil, and awful is the consequence (TPJS, pp. 357-358; HC, 6:313-315; See also TPJS p. 128).

After quoting the Savior who said he had lost none except the son of perdition, President Brigham Young said: "Who is going away into everlasting punishment? They that reject the Gospel that sin against the spirit of truth, light and intelligence. Who can sin against this light? Those that have it can sin against it. Those that are acquainted with it. Who can sin the sin unto death? Those that have eternal life given to them, and they turn away from the holy commandments of the Lord, and crucify [sic] to themselves afresh the Son of God, shed innocent blood or consent thereto. The Lord will save all the rest." (Brigham Young, typescript of discourse, dated July 14, 1861, CHO).

The Son of God, as well as all those who are sons of God, are among the innocent blood spoken of. Those who turn against the light of heaven will do all within their power to destroy

the work of God and to destroy those who are innocent, if it needs be they shed their blood or consent thereto. Alma told his son Corianton that adultery was "most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost" for once the Holy Ghost "has had place in you, and ye know that ye deny it, behold, this is a sin which is unpardonable; yea, and whosoever murdereth against the light and knowledge of God, it is not easy for him to obtain forgiveness." (Alma 39:5-6). In fact, the Lord said there is no forgiveness (D&C 76:34).

Joseph said that once a person has been sealed up, he cannot be renewed again. The power of Elijah cannot seal against the unpardonable sin, for "this is a reserve made in the seals and power of the Priesthood" (TPJS, p. 339). "You cannot save such persons; [because] you cannot bring them to repentance" (TPJS, p. 358).

Those who commit the unpardonable sin have their "destruction made sure" (Helaman 13:38). They are cast into outer darkness where there is no light, heat or glory, where they will partake of the full powers of the second death. They will suffer the pains of the damned until the effect of the second death overtakes them and their identity is lost forever (Wilford Woodruff Journal, February 17, 1856; August, 1857; JD, 4:31-32, 54, 372; 5:95; 7:57).

While the second death is total separation from God (outer darkness), the effect of the second death is "the eternal destruction of both soul and body" (2 Nephi 1:22), or "the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit" (2 Nephi 9:10), where they will ultimately "become extinct both soul and body" (Alma 36:15). This is the "awful death [which] cometh upon the wicked" (Alma 40:26; Alma 15:17; 30:47; D&C 76:31-38).

Joseph Smith revealed that "the contention in [the council in] heaven was---Jesus said there would be certain souls that would not be saved [sons of perdition]; and the devil said he could save them all, and laid his plans before the grand council, who gave their vote in favor of Jesus Christ. So the devil rose up in rebellion against God" (TPJS, p. 357).

Satan was not interested in suffering for the sins of mankind, and so thought he could guarantee a sinless world by forcing all to obey him, thereby taking away their agency. In that way he thought he could save even the sons of perdition, but the council voted against him. It is no wonder the heavens wept at the fall of Lucifer and the fall of the third of God's children who followed after him, for they all became sons of perdition and will suffer the second death and ultimately lose their identity.

A person can only commit the unpardonable sin either in the spirit before coming to earth, as one third of the hosts did, or after the person has come to earth. Said Joseph: "No man can commit the unpardonable sin after the dissolution of the body, nor in this life, until he receives the [fullness of the] Holy Ghost; but they must do it in this world" (TPJS, p. 357).

Although David murdered Uriah, he did not commit the unpardonable sin because "he never did obtain the spirit and power of Elijah and the fullness of the Priesthood" (TPJS, p. 339). He will, however, suffer in hell for his sin, but will come forth to the Telestial Kingdom when it is fully paid (TPJS, p. 339; MD, pp. 520, 778; Revelation 22:15; D&C 76:81-112).

Those who have been sealed up to eternal life and who then commit adultery will be turned over to the buffetings of Satan to pay the penalty for such a sin. After payment they will

then come forth to exaltation (D&C 132:19, 26). Although one source indicates adultery will keep a sealed person from being exalted (DNTC, 3:347), D&C 132 and Joseph's statement in History of the Church do not support that idea (HC, 6:81). Joseph's statement in History of the Church would make more sense and be in harmony with D&C 132 and other sections if it read: "If a man commit adultery [and does not repent], he cannot receive the celestial kingdom of God. Even if he is saved in any kingdom, it cannot be the celestial kingdom" (HC, 6:81, November 25, 1843). President Spencer W. Kimball expressed his feelings that those who commit adultery, whether they have been sealed up or not, and then repent, can still obtain the celestial kingdom (See Spencer W. Kimball, The Miracle of Forgiveness [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft Publishers, 1969], pp. 346-352).

In addition, one of the last statements Joseph ever made on the subject was April 6, 1844 when he said: "all sins shall be forgiven, except the sin against the Holy Ghost" (TPJS, pp. 357-358, emphasis added). If a person sins willfully after being sealed to eternal life, he will be delivered over to the buffetings of Satan and will stay there until he fully pays for his sins, which becomes his day of redemption or deliverance (D&C 132:26). Sidney Rigdon was sealed up by the washing of feet in April 1836 and eight years later was delivered over to the buffetings of Satan by President Brigham Young because he would not repent of willful rebellion and apostasy (T&S, 5:661; HC, 7:268-269). If a sealed person sins ignorantly, without knowing or realizing it, then his sins will fall under the atonement of Christ which still covers the sins of those who repent. The person will not pay for them himself (DNTC 3:342-343; Luke 10:30-35). Not all who are members of the church are able to commit the unpardonable sin, because they have not received sufficient knowledge and experience to do so. President George Q. Cannon said that: "A man must have sufficient knowledge to make him a God in order to be a devil."

Lucifer had to be a great and a powerful being. He stood high in the presence of God, and his fall was greater than it would have been if he had occupied an inferior station. Therefore, the more we know concerning God, the more power and the more gifts we get from God, if they are abused, the greater will be our condemnation and the greater will be the depth to which we shall fall when we do fall (MS, 53:577-580, emphasis added; See also JD, 4:372).

On November 29, 1893, Apostle Abraham H. Cannon, son of President George Q. Cannon, stated the First Presidency had explained that only those "who receive a testimony of the Gospel---who receive the Holy Ghost, and the highest blessings of the Church [the fullness of the priesthood], and then willfully deny the light they have obtained" will become sons of perdition, having committed the unpardonable sin (Abraham H. Cannon Journal, November 29, 1893).

In 1926 President Heber J. Grant re-iterated this concept, saying: "The sons of perdition--a comparatively few--are those who deny God after they have known Him, and repudiated the Gospel of Christ after receiving the fullness thereof and tasting of its eternal powers and glories." (Typescript of letter dated 5 April 1926). Thus a person cannot become a son of perdition until he has been sealed up to eternal life and has become a son of God.

Although brethren receive the Melchizedek priesthood and covenant to magnify their

callings, still, many priesthood bearers do not live up to the obligations placed upon them. This does not qualify them, however, for the penalty described in D&C 84:41 of the unpardonable sin. At the April 1972 General Conference of the Church, Elder Marion G. Romney said:

Now, I do not think this means that all who fail to magnify their callings in the priesthood will have committed the unpardonable sin, but I do think that priesthood bearers who have entered into the covenants that we enter into---in the waters of baptism, in connection with the law of tithing, the Word of Wisdom, and the many other covenants we make---and then refuse to live up to these covenants will stand in jeopardy of losing the promise of eternal life. ("The Covenant of the Priesthood," *Ensign*, 2 [July 1972], p. 99).

Only when a person has come to the point in his life where he is worthy to continue his progression and receive the fullness of the priesthood blessings, will he be able to commit this sin. An understanding of the unpardonable sin will give a person reason to totally commit to living righteously, but it should not dissuade him from striving for perfection and to make his calling and election sure. President George Q. Cannon said "there is glory and exaltation in proportion to faithfulness, to knowledge and to gifts and opportunities enjoyed" (MS, 53:577-580; May 10, 1891).